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News Releases

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PRELIMINARY BURLEY TOBACCO POUNDAGE MARKETING QUOTA REFERENDUM RESULT

WASHINGTON, March 12—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that preliminary results from a mail referendum held Feb. 24-27 show burley tobacco growers voted to continue poundage marketing quotas and price support for for the 1992, 1993 and 1994 marketing years.

Keith Bjerke, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, said results show 119,439 of the 123,493 producers who voted in the referendum—or 96.72 percent—voted yes. A vote of at least two-thirds in favor was necessary to continue poundage marketing quotas.

In the last referendum, held February 1989, 97.76 percent of the voting growers favored marketing quotas on an acreage-poundage basis for the 1989, 1990 and 1991 crops.

Burley tobacco is grown in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

These are the state-by-state results:

State	Votes Cast	Yes	No	Favoring Quotas Percentage
Alabama	3	3	0	100.00
Arkansas	1	1	0	100.00
Georgia	5	4	1	80.00
Illinois	0	0	0	0.00
Indiana	3,579	3,438	141	96.06
Kansas	7	6	1	85.71
Kentucky	73,115	71,659	1,456	98.00
Missouri	702	670	32	95.44
North Carolina	4,246	4,093	153	96.40
Ohio	5,229	5,058	171	96.73

Tennessee	26,881	25,522	1,359	94.94
Virginia	8,579	7,880	699	91.85
West Virginia	1,146	1,105	41	96.42
Total	123,493	119,439	4,054	96.72

Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

#

U.S. AGRIBUSINESS FIRMS INVITED TO ATTEND CARIBBEAN EXPO 92

WASHINGTON, March 12—The U.S. Department of Agriculture is sponsoring a business seminar and exposition in Kingston, Jamaica, April 8-12, for U.S. entrepreneurs interested in establishing two-way trade linkages with Jamaican counterparts.

The exposition will include displays of Jamaican fresh fruits and vegetables, processed products, ornamental plants, cut flowers, and fish. U.S. buyers, investors, traders, and brokers will be briefed about successful export businesses and new trading opportunities from local and U.S. officials. Business appointments for U.S. participants with government and private sector officials can be prearranged.

Co-sponsoring this 6th Biennial Trade Exposition are the U.S. Agency for International Development and Jamaica's Ministry of Agriculture, in collaboration with Jamaica Promotion, Ltd., the Jamaica Manufacturer's and Exporters Associations, and the Caricom Export Development project.

There are no registration fees or administrative costs, but participants are responsible for their travel, lodging, and meals.

Contact: Kimberly Capolino, Food Industries Division, USDA's Office of International Cooperation and Development, (202) 690-4984, FAX (202) 690-0349.

Laura Whitaker (202) 690-2796

#

USDA TO BEGIN ASIAN GYPSY MOTH PROJECT IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

WASHINGTON, March 12—Acting Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman today declared an emergency in Oregon and Washington because of an infestation of Asian gypsy moths (AGM).

Veneman made available \$14.4 million in U.S. Department of Agriculture funds to help in a cooperative state/federal program to eradicate the pests from the Pacific Northwest, beginning in April.

“The Asian gypsy moth, a voracious pest of trees, was found in detection traps in the Puget Sound region of Washington state, along the Columbia River near Portland, Ore., and in the Canadian province of British Columbia,” said Veneman. “The introduction of this exotic pest poses a major threat to forests on the North American continent.”

B. Glen Lee, deputy administrator for plant protection and quarantine with USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, said the AGM is similar to the European gypsy moth, which regularly defoliates 4 million acres a year in Northeastern forests. In 1981, a major outbreak year, the pest defoliated more than 12 million acres, causing hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and significant harm to the environment.

“If AGM became established in the abundant forests of the Pacific Northwest, the damage could be much more extensive and costly, not to mention the long-term effects on the environment,” Lee said.

Unlike the flightless females of the European variety, AGM females are active fliers and could spread quickly throughout the western United States, Lee said.

In Russia, the Asian strain attacks more than 600 varieties of trees and other plants, while preferring larch, alder, oak and willows.

To coordinate U.S. and Canadian eradication efforts, USDA and Agriculture Canada formed an AGM Coordinating Committee to consult regularly, develop common approaches, establish similar policies and share information.

AGM eradication programs will use the naturally occurring *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) bacteria that produces a caterpillar-specific toxin. When sprayed on tree leaves, Bt will suppress the appetites of caterpillars that eat the leaves. The caterpillars’ movements slow, and they usually die in 7-10 days.

The Asian strain of gypsy moth was first identified in North America late in 1991 near the port of Vancouver in British Columbia. Ships

infested with AGM egg masses probably introduced the pest to the United States and Canada while visiting West Coast ports from Asia at a time when newly hatched larvae could be blown ashore, said Lee.

The declaration of emergency is scheduled for publication in a future Federal Register.

Doug Hendrix (301) 436-7253

#

FOREST SERVICE RELEASES 1991 TIMBER SALES REPORT

WASHINGTON, March 13—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service today reported revenues from timber sales on national forests exceeded costs by \$472.3 million in fiscal year 1991, based on \$1.2 billion in gross revenues.

The revenues were generated from the harvest of 8.5 billion board feet of timber. The figures were released today in the 1991 Timber Sale Program Annual Report, which is compiled every year through the agency's Timber Sale Program Information Reporting System (TSPIRS).

"The national forest timber program this year supported an estimated 103,000 local jobs, which generated approximately \$4.7 billion in income and \$713 million in federal income taxes returned to the Treasury," Forest Service Chief F. Dale Robertson said.

The Forest Service made payments of \$301.4 million to states and counties in fiscal year 1991 for use by local school systems and highway departments.

Agency officials estimate the long-term economic value of the FY 1991 harvest at \$892 million. In fiscal year 1991, 77 percent of the total timber harvest from the national forests came from forests where revenues exceeded expenditures.

The 1991 TSPIRS report has been improved based on suggestions made by the General Accounting Office and an independent accounting firm, Robertson said. The TSPIRS system uses the same rules of accounting used by virtually every corporation in the country.

John Mahoney (202) 205-1060

#

NEW CROP RESIDUE TABLE WILL HELP FARMERS IN SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION

WASHINGTON, March 13—Farmers can now estimate the amount of crop residue left by various types of tillage equipment and practices by using a new reference table developed jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Equipment Manufacturers Institute.

The table contains information on more than a dozen types of farm equipment, such as plows, tillers, cultivators, drills, planters, and applicators, with various spacing and depths of blades and sweeps.

Percentage of residue left on the surface after tillage is given in all cases for both nonfragile residue (such as corn, wheat, and sorghum) and fragile residue (such as soybeans, peanuts, and cotton).

“This table is especially important to farmers incorporating crop residue management into their conservation compliance plans,” said SCS Chief William Richards. “Of the 135 million acres of highly erodible cropland, about 75 percent have conservation plans that call for crop residue management.”

Richards said crop residue management is one of the most cost-efficient and environmentally sound ways to control soil erosion and protect water quality. By reducing soil erosion, crop residue management keeps sediment, including nutrients such as phosphorus that attach to soil particles, out of streams and lakes.

The table was developed by a cooperative task force that included representatives of EMI, SCS and USDA’s Agricultural Research Service and Extension Service.

The table will be incorporated in SCS’s Field Office Technical Guide, in use at the more than 3,000 SCS offices, and will be made available by the North American Equipment Dealers Association through members’ dealerships nationwide.

EMI is headquartered in Chicago, Ill., and serves manufacturers of agricultural, construction, forestry, materials handling, and utility equipment.

Leslie Wilder (202) 720-2472

#

1991-CROP FEED GRAINS MAY NOT ENTER FARMER-OWNED RESERVE

WASHINGTON, March 13—Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman today announced 1991-crop feed grains will not be allowed into the Farmer-Owned Reserve.

Under provisions of the Agricultural Act of 1949, the entry of 1991-crop feed grains into the FOR must be announced by March 15. The secretary of agriculture must allow entry when the average market price for corn for the 90-days preceding the announcement is less than 120 percent of the corn price support rate and the 1991 estimated corn ending stocks-to-use ratio is more than 22.5 percent.

Entry may be allowed when only one condition is met. Since neither condition has been met, there is no authority to allow entry of 1991-crop feed grains into the FOR.

The following factors were used in making this determination:

- 120 percent of corn price support rate, \$1.94 per bushel;
- 90-day corn average market price, \$2.42 per bushel (Source: Fiveday adjusted average corn price for the 90-day period, Dec. 12, 1991 to March 10);
- estimated 1991-1992 corn ending stocks, 1,091 million bushels;
- estimated 1991-1992 corn use, 7,925 million bushels;
- estimated 1991-1992 corn ending stocks-to-use ratio (1,091 million bushels divided by 7,925 million bushels), 0.138.

The source for the last three factors is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates issued March 11.

Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

#

CHOLESTEROL TEST FOR WORMS COULD HELP BAY OYSTERS

WASHINGTON—A cholesterol test developed for root-eating worms by a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist could have an unexpected payoff—more oysters in the Chesapeake Bay.

“I designed the test to learn more about nematodes, tiny soil-dwelling worms,” said David Chitwood with USDA's Agricultural Research

Service in Beltsville, Md.

Chitwood's test identifies nematodes' cholesterol and other sterol compounds more quickly and accurately than other methods. All plants and animals need sterols, which they convert into hormones and use as building blocks for cell membranes.

Chitwood said, "Nematodes convert sterols they get from plants into cholesterol and other compounds they need to grow. If environmentally safe compounds can be developed to short-circuit the conversion, they could become an alternative to chemical nematicides—some of which can pollute ground water."

The pests cost U.S. farmers \$7 billion a year in chemical controls and damage to corn, soybeans and other crops.

A University of Maryland botanist, Glenn W. Patterson, adapted the test for studies aimed at learning which algae best nourishes the bay's oysters. "We want to learn which sterols are most important in oysters and which algae species best supply those sterols. That will give an additional scientific basis for knowing what improvements in the bay's water quality would best promote growth," Patterson said.

Pollution from many sources may be a factor in the bay's slumping oyster harvest, which is blamed mainly on overharvesting and disease, Patterson said. The 1990 commercial harvest was 420,000 bushels, down from 2.5 million in 1975.

While the oysters get some sterols from green algae, Patterson said they may get more sterols from brownish-to-yellowish ones known as diatoms. The distinction could be important, he said, because green algae have surged at the expense of diatoms, due to excess nitrogen and other nutrients entering the bay from a six-state, 64,000-square-mile area.

"The buildup of green algae—as well as other pollutants such as heavy metals—may aggravate oyster diseases," Patterson said. "Also, oysters help clean the bay by removing algae, but fewer oysters are out there doing this."

Chitwood's test is a modification of a method called reversed-phase high-pressure liquid chromatography. It has fewer steps than current techniques and takes as little as 30 minutes. He used the test to identify 28 sterols in the corn root lesion nematode, including nine found for the first time in any nematode.

The new test will work on any nematode, he said. Plus, it could be useful in studies of sterols in crop plants, animals and humans, as well as oysters.

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March 16, 1992

#

SCIENTISTS RELEASE EXOTIC INSECTS IN FIGHT AGAINST WHITEFLY

WASHINGTON, March 16—Today in Texas, the U.S. Department of Agriculture began releasing tiny insects expected to end the whitefly's days of pillage on vegetables, greenhouse ornamentals and cotton.

The silver bullet is a microscopic, parasitic, stingless wasp from Europe. It is harmless to humans and animals, but deadly to many species of the whitefly.

APHIS began releasing the wasps, *Eretmocerus mundus*, on the ground in the Rio Grande Valley, said Ron Hennessey, supervisory entomologist with APHIS's Biological Control Laboratory in Mission, Texas.

The agency began releasing the wasps in California's Imperial Valley earlier this month.

The wasp accomplishes its mission by laying eggs in whitefly larvae and pupae. The end result is death of the parasitized whitefly.

"*E. mundus* measures only about one-fortieth of an inch long—smaller than the period at the end of this sentence—and it occurs naturally over large areas in North Africa, Southern Europe, the Middle East, India and Pakistan," said Hennessey.

The wasps APHIS is now releasing are descendants of specimens collected in Murcia, Spain, by scientists based at the USDA's European Biological Control Laboratory in Montpellier, France. The laboratory is operated by USDA's Agricultural Research Service.

After arriving at the APHIS Biological Control Laboratory, the wasps were placed in growth chambers to multiply. They were then sent to the California and Texas release sites.

The APHIS entomologists who turned them loose to war against the whitefly will now monitor their progress as they spread into new areas.

"*E. mundus* completes its entire life cycle in about 19 days at warm temperatures, about the same time as the whitefly takes to complete its

life cycle,” said Hennessey. “*E. mundus* adults attack the whitefly at each stage of the whitefly’s development from tiny crawler to pupa.”

“Although *E. mundus* kills whiteflies by parasitizing them, it can also kill by directly feeding on its host,” said Hennessey. “The adult female parasite uses her egg-laying apparatus to drill a hole through the skin of the whitefly. Then, rather than deposit an egg, she often turns to feed on the body fluids exuding from the wound.”

A close relative of *E. mundus*, *Encarsia formosa*, is produced by the millions in Europe and imported to the United States for control of the greenhouse whitefly, Hennessey said.

“But to be effective in greenhouses, *E. formosa* must be introduced repeatedly. We hope that *E. mundus* and other parasitic wasps will become permanently established in the United States. If this effort is successful, we will be able to redistribute the parasites throughout whitefly-infested areas for use in integrated pest management strategies,” Hennessey said.

The sweetpotato whitefly (SPW), *Bemisia tabaci*, is a small, white, scale-like insect of tropical origin. SPW attacks more than 450 species of plants and ornamentals, including sweet potatoes, cotton, squash, melons, lettuce, sugar beets, tomatoes, and poinsettias and many other ornamental plants.

“The SPW not only feeds on many crop plants, but the adults also can transmit diseases to the plants they feed on,” said Hennessey. “In squash and many other plants, it causes virus-like symptoms.”

The SPW also produces a sticky substance that it deposits on plant leaves, fruits, vegetables and open cotton bolls. The substance facilitates the growth of molds and can ruin harvests.

The insect’s waxy coating protects it from pesticides in its immature stage. It further avoids pesticide applications by surrounding itself with a honeydew secretion, and by inhabiting the underside of plant leaves.

Agricultural scientists believe the SPW originated either in the Orient or in the Middle East. International travelers most likely moved the whitefly around the world.

Doug Hendrix (301) 436-7253

#

USDA ANNOUNCES 1992 ASSESSMENTS FOR VIRGINIA FIRE-CURED/SUN-CURED TOBACCOS

WASHINGTON, March 16—The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Commodity Credit Corporation today announced that to qualify for price support loans under the tobacco program, producers of 1992-crop Virginia fire-cured (type 21) and sun-cured (type 37) tobaccos, must agree to pay no-net-cost assessments for deposit into no-net-cost accounts on all marketings.

No-net-cost assessments are 13.3165 cents per pound for Virginia firecured (type 21) and 13.396 cents per pound for sun-cured (type 37) tobaccos.

The no-net-cost assessments ensure the tobacco price support program will be operated at no-net-cost to taxpayers as required by the No-Net-Cost Tobacco Program Act of 1982.

The no-net-cost assessment is in addition to the marketing assessment of 1.367 cents per pound for Virginia fire-cured (type 21) and 1.208 cents per pound for sun-cured (type 37). The marketing assessments will be shared equally between producers and purchasers with each paying .6835 cent per pound for Virginia fire-cured (type 21) and .604 cent per pound for sun-cured (type 37) tobaccos.

The no-net-cost assessment, plus the 1992 marketing assessment, means that a total of 14 cents per pound will be collected from producers on each pound of Virginia fire-cured (type 21) and sun-cured (type 37) tobaccos marketed from the 1992 crop.

CCC consulted with the Dark Tobacco Sales Cooperative, the producerowned association through which price support is made available for Virginia fire-cured (type 21) and sun-cured (type 37) tobaccos, before reaching a final determination on the no-net-cost assessments.

Robert Feist (202) 720-6789

#

USDA DECLARES THE BROADLEAF PAPER-BARK TREE A NOXIOUS WEED

WASHINGTON, March 17—The U.S. Department of Agriculture today added the broadleaf paper-bark tree to its list of noxious weeds, preventing the tree from being moved into the country or between states without a permit.

“Our action, effective April 13, will prevent the artificial spread of the tree into noninfested areas of the United States,” said B. Glen Lee, deputy administrator for plant protection and quarantine with USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The tree is a problem, especially in Florida, because it out-competes native vegetation. Florida’s climate encourages the tree to grow faster and produce more seed than in other locations. The tree has lowered the water table in the southern part of the state, resulting in a loss of wetlands.

The tree now covers about 1.5 million acres in southern Florida, and smaller areas in California, Hawaii, Louisiana, Texas and Puerto Rico.

“Before declaring this tree a noxious weed, we published a proposal in the Federal Register and held two public meetings on the issue,” Lee said. “By requiring a permit for introduction or interstate movement of the tree, we can reduce the risk it will be disseminated in areas where it could become a pest.”

The tree, also known as *Melaleuca quinquenervia*, was introduced into this country in the early 1900’s from Australia. It was widely planted in the 1940’s and 1950’s because of its ability to control erosion, provide natural fences and windbreaks, furnish wood, and serve as an ornamental. Beekeepers also liked it because it flowers when few other plants do, thus helping bees overwinter.

Doug Hendrix (301) 436-7253

#

USDA RELEASES COST OF FOOD AT HOME FOR JANUARY

WASHINGTON, March 17—Here is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s monthly update of the weekly cost of food at home for January 1992:

Cost of food at home for a week in January 1992

	-----Food plans----- (In Dollars)			
	Thrifty	Low-cost	Moderate cost	Liberal
Families:				
Family of 2 (20-50 years)	49.10	61.90	76.10	94.70
Family of 2 (51 years and over)	46.40	59.50	73.30	87.70
Family of 4 with preschool children	71.60	89.30	108.80	133.90
Family of 4 with elemen- tary schoolchildren	81.90	105.00	130.90	157.70
Individuals in four-person families:				
Children:				
1-2 years	13.00	15.80	18.40	22.40
3-5 years	14.00	17.20	21.20	25.40
6-8 years	17.00	22.80	28.50	33.20
9-11 years	20.30	25.90	33.20	38.40
Females:				
12-19 years	21.20	25.30	30.70	37.20
20-50 years	21.20	26.30	31.90	40.90
51 and over	21.00	25.60	31.60	37.70
Males:				
12-14 years	21.10	29.30	36.50	42.80
15-19 years	21.80	30.20	37.60	43.50
20-50 years	23.40	30.00	37.30	45.20
51 and over	21.20	28.50	35.00	42.00

USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service computes the cost of food home for four food plans—thrifty, low-cost, moderate-cost, and liberal.

Sue Ann Ritchko, HNIS administrator, said the plans consist of foods that provide well-balanced meals and snacks for a week.

In computing the costs, USDA assumes all food is bought at the store and prepared at home. Costs do not include alcoholic beverages, pet food, soap, cigarettes, paper goods and other nonfood items bought at the store.

“USDA costs are only guides to spending,” Ritchko said. “Families may spend more or less, depending on such factors as where they buy their food, how carefully they plan and buy, whether some food is produced at home, what foods the family likes, and how much food is prepared at home.”

“Most families will find the moderate-cost or low-cost plan suitable,” she said. “The thrifty plan, which USDA uses to set the coupon allotment in the food stamp program, is for families who have tighter budgets. Families with unlimited resources might use the liberal plan.”

To use the chart to estimate your family's food costs:

—For members eating all meals at home—or carried from home—use the amounts shown in the chart.

—For members eating some meals out, deduct 5 percent for each meal eaten away from home from the amount shown for the appropriate family member. Thus, for a person eating lunch out 5 days a week, subtract 25 percent, or one-fourth the cost shown.

—For guests, add 5 percent of the amount shown for the proper age group for each meal.

Costs in the second part of the chart pertain to individuals in fourperson families. If your family has more or less than four, total the “individual” figures and make these adjustments (note: larger families tend to buy and use food more economically than smaller ones):

—For a one-person family, add 20 percent.

—For a two-person family, add 10 percent.

—For a three-person family, add 5 percent.

—For a five-or six-person family, subtract 5 percent.

—For a family of seven or more, subtract 10 percent.

Details of the four family food plans are available from the Nutrition Education Division, HNIS, USDA, Federal Building, Hyattsville, Md. 20782.

Johna Pierce (301) 436-8617

#

USDA RAPIDLY NEARS BRUCELLOSIS ERADICATION

WASHINGTON, March 18—A “rapid completion plan,” begun in 1990 to eradicate brucellosis by 1995, has decreased the number of cattle herds quarantined for the disease from 1231 to 495 in just two years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported today.

“After reaching rates of infection exceeding 120,000 herds in the 1950s, we can finally see the light at the end of the tunnel,” said Billy G. Johnson, acting deputy administrator for veterinary services in USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. “The brucellosis eradication program has been a real model for how states, industry and federal government can work together.”

Johnson attributes much of the program’s success in recent years to greater producer awareness about the disease. He cited a rule enacted last April that works as an incentive to depopulate infected herds by raising indemnity payments for exposed nonregistered cattle or bison when an entire herd is destroyed. Technological advances, including improved diagnostic techniques and early calfhood vaccination, also have boosted the program.

“As we move down to the zero point, we want to encourage owners not only to get rid of infected animals but also those that have been exposed to infected animals,” Johnson said.

“Even when we reach our goal, we’ll need to maintain a topnotch surveillance system to monitor any remaining cases and guard against importing the disease from another country,” Johnson said. “At that point, we would look at brucellosis almost as an exotic disease, and any infected herds would need to be eliminated immediately.”

Twenty-nine states are currently classified by APHIS as class-free. Class-free status is attained when no cattle or bison in a state are found to be infected for 12 consecutive months. Nineteen states maintain Class A status with an infection rate of less than 0.25 percent. Only two states are in Class B, which denotes an infection rate of 1.5 percent or less.

Brucellosis, also called Bang’s disease, is an infectious, contagious bacterial disease that causes abortion, reduced fertility and lower milk yields in cattle. It also can infect other farm animals, such as swine. Humans can get the disease by drinking unpasteurized milk from infected animals or by handling infected animals.

Alan Zagier (301) 436-7799

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